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ABSTRACT

An accountability policy is seen as having three basic elements: demonstrated student accomplishment, independent accomplishment audits, and public reports. It requires the regular independent review of results obtained for resources expended. Effects resulting from implementation of such a policy are: (1) the focus of schooling shifts from teaching to learning, from input to output, from process to product, from courses taken to competence demonstrated; (2) the independence of teaching and learning will be understood and appreciated; (3) accreditation will focus on achievement, accomplishment, and student competency; (4) the growth and adoption of criterion-referenced and performance standards will occur; (5) serious attempts will be made to truly individualize instruction; (6) educators will scramble to develop a technology of instruction--to find and use "what works"; (7) the educational practitioner will begin to distinguish between good educational practice, poor practice and malpractice; (8) serious efforts will be made to understand and develop productivity in education; (9) among more important issues confronted will be: what the unique contributions of the school system are to the broader societal education system, as well as its limitations; what and to whom are personnel responsible; and what arrangements and consortia can be developed to aid schools in jobs for which they lack the capability; and (10) performance contracting, PPBS, and performance objectives will be widely adapted and adopted. Guidance activities should take steps to provide an appropriate response to accountability. Steps that should be taken by pupil personnel administrators are stated. (DB)

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ACCOUNTABILITY

To Whom, For What, and By What Criteria?

Speeches Presented at

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PUPIL PERSONNLL ADMINISTRATORS

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ACCOUNTABILITY IN EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR GUIDANCE WORKERS

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An important change has come into what Americans expect of their public schools. The optimism about their value is still there and continues strong but serious doubts have arisen about the school systems' ability to actually deliver on its promises.

Accountability has to do with honoring promises. It is the matching of intent to results; the comparison of what was supposed to happen to what actually happened. In education, accountability is the policy of demanding regular independent reports of promised student accomplishment for dollars provided. It is the hair-shirt policy--the responses at budget-passing time to the request for more money with the question, "What did you do with that other money?" It is not performance contracting, or behavioral objectives, or PPBS, though these inventions may be useful in implementing an accountability policy. In the final analysis, accountability is the final analysis--the hearing to get the facts, to determine worth, to check results. It brings to school instruction the same flavor of inspection and feedback brought by the fiscal auditor to school finance.

Our public elementary and secondary schools enroll more than forty-four million students, employ close to two million teachers and spend about forty billion dollars in tax funds annually. We have all kinds of measurements of where the money goes and we have an elaborate and

mandatory outside review to account for the monies spent through the mechanism of a fiscal audit. We can pin down per-capita expenditures in any school district in the county and clearly state how much any one of these spent for construction, and service on its debt. We can enumerate pupil-teacher ratios and library volumes per child ratios.

But we have virtually no measurement of the results that the educational enterprise yields. We do not know, for example, what it costs, on the average, to increase a youngster's reading ability one year; all we know is what it costs to keep him seated for one year. It would make much more sense if we included, along with the "per-pupil cost," a "learning-unit cost." This would focus attention on the level of learning and the accomplishments of children along with the analysis of costs of maintaining them in school. At its heart, the only acceptable definition of effective teaching centers on how well the students learn. Accountability is the policy declaration (together with a variety of techniques) to implement that policy which focuses attention on results.

Does the public expect that as a result of having spent x millions of dollars, it will have y number of teachers or z number of counselors? Does it expect to own a given number of textbooks, of test tubes and analytical balances, of trombones and world globes?

Obviously not. What it expects from its investment is educated children with the demonstrated competence to meet their own and society's needs to the full measure of their potential.

There are many signs that accountability as a "proof of results" policy is taking hold.

In his March 3rd education message, President Nixon stated,

> From these considerations, we derive another new concept: accountability. School administrators and school teachers alike are responsible for their performance, and it is in their interest as well as in the interests of their pupils that they be held accountable.

Governor Russell W. Peterson, newly elected chairman of the Education Commission of the States, in a speech to the Commission this year entitled, "Accountability in Elementary and Secondary Education," said,

> As governor, I am accountable for achievement of these specific goals (referring to the state's goals in his "Future of the State" message).
>
> Governor Peterson continued, "I wince a little in reviewing my objectives for education from the same speech. All the goals are inputs, such as completing the institution of state-supported kindergartens; establishing community schools; completing the upgrading of occupational-vocational education; and establishing pre-kindergarten programs by 1976. Why couldn't I list as goals for education: reducing the high school dropouts by 50% or insuring that every child who left the schools could read and comprehend political and economic news, so that he could function effectively as a literate voter in our democracy?"

An accountability policy has three basic elements: demonstrated student accomplishment, independent accomplishment audits and public reports. It requires the regular independent review of results obtained for resources expended. Several major effects upon education attend serious efforts to implement such a policy. Some of the more important of these consequences are:

1. The focus of the schooling enterprise will dramatically shift from teaching to learning, from input to output, from process to product, from courses taken to competence demonstrated.

2. People will understand and appreciate the independence of teaching and learning. There can be teaching without learning and learning without teaching. What counts is the effectiveness of teaching--and this is determined by results.
3. The basis of the notion of "quality" education will be altered. Accreditation will focus on achievement, on accomplishment, on student competency as emphatically as is now done on such process indicators as degrees held by teachers, spaces provided and dollars spent.
4. There will be a drastic impact on teachers who "curve" students, thus regularly failing a proportion of the class and we shall see the growth and adoption of real standards--criterion-referenced and performance standards--instead of relative positioning on vaguely known validation groups.
5. Professional labeling of students as slow, retarded, or underachieving or culturally disadvantaged and the like will be recognized as self-defeating and poor substitutes for professional expertise and serious attempts will be made truly to individualize instruction.
6. Educators will scramble to develop a technology of instruction--to find and use "what works." It must be remembered that technology includes but is not limited to equipment. The probability is high that in instruction, the most important part of what works is competence in interpersonal behavior and motivation.
7. The educational practitioner will begin to distinguish

between good educational practice, poor practice and mal-practice--and more swiftly and adroitly to strengthen poor practices and eliminate mal-practice.

8. A serious attempt will be made to understand and develop productivity in education, including the search for more cost-effective and efficient educational processes.
9. Issues previously avoided will finally be seriously confronted. Among the more important of these issues will be the following:
   a. What are the unique contributions of the school system to the broader societal education system and what are its limitations?
   b. For what are personnel responsible and to whom are they accountable?
   c. What arrangements and consortia can be developed to enable schools to carry burdens for which they lack capability?
10. Performance contracting, PPBS, and the extensive use of performance objectives will be widely adapted and adopted as tools to strengthen professional competence and communication with clients.

Perhaps the one division of education that can least afford to assume either an ostrich-like or defensive position in regard to the issue of accountability is the division of guidance. Those of us who are guidance workers need to be reminded that guidance is a unique American phenomenon and perhaps owes its very existence to a well-developed economy. Under-developed and less-developed nations are unlikely to devote severely limited

educational funds to a practice dedicated to tuning its citizens to "Maslovian" peak-experiences. Nations struggling to meet the more basic needs on Maslow's hierarchy can hardly be expected to devote high priority to self-actualization. Education is entering an age of accountability and is undergoing the stark and rigorous analysis of an appropriations hearing where only high priority needs can be funded from among an overwhelming array of genuine needs. Under these conditions, support for the practice of guidance, even in this affluent society, may receive a real drubbing. Teachers and administrator groups have already demonstrated a disposition to abandon and sacrifice many guidance efforts in order to buttress their own financial security in negotiations with school boards and legislatures.

This suggests that those spokesmen of the formal education process who can most articulately discuss their missions, display their validated practice and demonstrate their effectiveness will compete more successfully for tight monies. Seen in this light, the guidance field with its overly-ambitious and somewhat mystical goals, its want of communicable road maps for attainment of objectives and its failure to demonstrate effectiveness, is particularly vulnerable.

Such a characterization of the plight of the pupil personnel service is not meant to promote despair. Indeed, the concern expressed is prompted out of sympathy with and dedication to its basic commitment--the preservation of the dignity and individuality of students. However, such noteworthy goals become mere word magic when practitioners are unable (and even unwilling) to specify technologies or demonstrate results. Perhaps guidance workers have assumed burdens beyond their

capabilities and consequently have placed themselves in a very precarious position.

What does all this mean for the practice of guidance? At the very least, it means that the cloistered nature of many guidance activities will come under public scrutiny, and at most it could mean failing support for the guidance effort, if it fails to demonstrate its effectiveness. Obviously, all of this is not going to happen tomorrow, but the storm clouds are gathering and the precious "lead time" should be used to get one's "house in order."

Getting one's house in order involves (1) adjusting burdens to capabilities; i.e., not taking on more than one can accomplish; (2) stating these goals or burdens or promises in molar language for inspirational value but plunging immediately into the derivation of objectives reflecting specific and demonstrable (auditable) behavior; (3) identifying criterion measures using a variety of modes of proof for evaluating progress toward objectives; and (4) discovering alternate routes and strategies for reaching goals with special attention to those which are cost effective. This four-step action plan may be valuable not only because it will be an appropriate response to accountability as policy but because the guidance worker will likely experience much personal satisfaction from the clear direction and feedback resulting from this clarity of role and function.

In pursuit of such a professional response to accountability, I would urge pupil personnel administrators to:

1. Help their personnel diagnose and describe the degree of predictable improvement that can be achieved by each child

served.

2. Compile and audit data based on actual experience to provide a storehouse of good practice.
3. Design precise, individual systems capable of identifying, in terms of performance criteria, the strengths, weaknesses and actual benefits obtained by each student as he proceeds through his formal education career and beyond.
4. Design programs to train the staff in the effective introduction, use and monitoring of good practice.
5. Provide plans for involving and informing other education workers and the community about successful practices.
6. Apply the recognition that all school personnel share responsibility with the home and the client for achieving results, each partner being accountable for executing those phases in which he is most competent.
7. Develop charters of accountability with personnel which:
   a. Introduce high but realistic expectation of results coupled with processes supported by extensive research data.
   b. Challenge assumptions based on normal curves or any testing data which is negative or defeatist.
   c. Allows for a realistic time period in which to achieve and measure sustained advances in student competency.
   d. Focuses on the continuous development in the staff of the skills and competencies required to implement a system of individualized guidance.

e. Encourages the establishment of a cost-effective, business-like system of orientation to results and a commitment to continuous evaluation of auditable progress for student and guidance worker alike.

William James, the great Harvard psychologist, observed that we can gain good habits by acting out the desired habit until it becomes automatic.

In the 1970's, we ought to act as if public schools are on trial and public education is threatened...it is!

In the 1970's, we who are paid employees in education ought to act as if the credibility of our profession depends upon our becoming accountable for improved student accomplishment...it does!

Making, breaking and delivering on promises has become a central concern in our fast-changing complex society. In a simpler age, a man's word was his bond and a firm handshake was enough to seal a bargain. Performance contracts and independent audits certainly were not needed, for failure to deliver was easy to observe and the consequences of a broken promise could be overcome. That this is no longer true can be attested by all of us who have experienced defective drugs, shoddy and dangerous service and mal-practice in essential institutions--including education.

The notion of accountability is not new in education. Plutarch, the great thinker of classical antiquity, wrote about 2000 years ago the following passage:

> Such fathers as commit their sons to tutors and teachers, and themselves never at all witness or overhear their instruction, deserve rebuke, for they fall far short of their obligation. They

> ought themselves to undertake examinations of their children every few days and not place their trust in the disposition of a wage earner; even the latter will bestow greater care on the children if they know that they will periodically be called to account.

Perhaps the most fitting summary of the power of accountability is provided by the desperate action of a mayor of a drought-stricken Mexican town. Robert Silverburg, in the book, The Challenge of Climate: Man and His Environment, quotes the ultimatum issued by the mayor to the clergy to hold them accountable for results:

> If within the peremptory period of eight days from the date of this decree rain does not fall abundantly, no one will go to mass or say prayers...If the drought continues eight days more, the churches and chapels shall be burned, missals, rosaries and other objects of devotion will be destroyed...If, finally, in a third period of eighty days it shall not rain, all the priests, friars, nuns and saints, male and female, will be beheaded.

Fortunately for the clergy, Divine Providence responded to this no-nonsense approach by sending torrential downpours within four days.

The crises in delivery on promises in education are not quite that bad, but the moral is clear: results are what count, not promises or lamentations.